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## **Uzbekistan - Republic of**

### **Agricultural Biotechnology Annual**

#### **Agricultural Biotechnology**

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**Report Highlights:**

Uzbekistan has no regulations governing production, importation or labeling of bio-engineered products. A draft law is still under discussion, although implementation is not expected in the near future.

**Executive Summary**

Uzbekistan does not commercially grow any transgenic crops nor does it have regulations in place affecting imports of these products. There are no regulations concerning biotechnology-related labeling of processed food products. As a major cotton producer Uzbekistan could benefit from planting BT cotton.

## **U.S. Trade**

U.S. agricultural trade to Uzbekistan is hampered by Uzbekistan's complex trade regime based on an import-substitution policy and aided by high tariffs and transportation costs to this double-landlocked country. U.S. agricultural exports have averaged only \$1.43 million over the past three calendar years (2008-2010), mostly soybeans, planting seeds, and some dairy products.

## **Biotechnology Trade and Production**

- Uzbekistan does not commercially produce biotech crops.
- The Uzbek Institute of Genetics and Plant Experimental Biology is doing some research on biotechnology. However, there are not much published results from this research and there are no known plans for bio-engineered crops to be produced commercially in Uzbekistan in the near future.
- Until FY 2005 Uzbekistan had been a food aid recipient. Transgenic U.S. soybeans and soybean oil had no problems entering the country.

## **Regulations**

Currently, Uzbekistan has no laws or regulations governing the approval, production, or importation of bio-engineered plant products, including processed foods, animal feed or seed. According to the Ministry for Foreign Economic Relations, Investments and Trade (MFERIT) and the State Committee for Protection of Nature (the main governmental organizations responsible for biotech issues), a draft decree dealing with the production and trade of genetically modified agricultural products has been under development in the past few years, but there they have given no indication of when it will be finalized and put in force. The government has tasked the Institute of Genetics and Plant Experimental Biology to develop documents on the use and safety of biotech products. However, the draft decree is still under consideration by a number of different ministries and by the special parliament committee. Based on observations of official and independent experts, the government is not expected to approve the decree in the near future. The draft is not expected to be as restrictive as the biotech policies in the European Union. Instead, Uzbekistan is reportedly modeling its law on the existing biotechnology laws of CIS and Baltic countries.

As for import requirements for animal products like meat and dairy, Uzbekistan's Veterinary authorities adopted unified CIS Veterinary/Sanitary certificates which prohibit importation of GMO products. This includes meat products produced from animals that consumer biotech feed. However, in practice Uzbekistan has no certifying centers for analyzing GMO products during importation.

Although Uzbekistan participates in the Convention on Biological Diversity, it is still not a signatory to the Cartagena Protocol.

## **Labeling**

Uzbekistan has no uniform system of food labeling, including biotechnology labeling. However, in accordance with Uzbek legislation on protection of consumer's rights, all products sold in the country must contain the following information in the Uzbek language:

- Name of the product;
- Manufacturer's name and contact information;
- Ingredients and 'best before' date (if applicable);
- User's manual (if needed); and cautions (if any).

In 1999-2000 USDA's Cochran Fellowship Program organized two training courses related to biotechnology for the experts from the relevant Uzbek ministries. In addition, the United Nation's Office for Environmental Protection issued grants to some Central Asian republics for biotechnology-related projects. Reportedly, among Central Asian countries only Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan did not get these grants, because their governments failed to apply.

### **Testing**

Uzbekistan has no testing facilities for bio-engineered products. According to the Institute of Genetics, which is working on the draft legislation, a request to fund purchases of testing equipment has been submitted to the government.

### **Potential Benefits**

Uzbekistan is one of the world's leading cotton producers, and would likely benefit greatly from the adoption of Bt cotton technology. Pests, including the bollworm, reduce yield and quality, and pesticide spraying has caused severe environmental damage. It is impossible to quantify the potential benefits, but there is every reason to believe they could be substantial. As the cotton sector remains in state hands, a high-level policy decision could have immediate widespread effects. Unfortunately, however, a lack of transparency makes it difficult to identify an appropriate channel through which to inform the government of the potential benefits.

### **Public Perception**

There is very little information on biotechnology published in Uzbek newspapers. Over the past ten years, only a handful of articles were published in the popular press. In general, the media does not cover this issue. As a result, public awareness is low and attitudes are unknown.

Still some international organizations are trying to do some educational work in this sphere. For example, in June of 2008 FAO and the local ICARDA office organized a training seminar in Tashkent for experts and interested representatives of various state organizations in Central Asia. The seminar covered the issues of risk management and risk assessment for biotech crops.